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Resurrecting Kinetics: Relevancy of Joint Lethal Fires in COIN Operations

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Abstract

Throughout the history of armed conflict, lethal fires made significant contributions toward success on the battlefield. Most accomplishments occurred primarily in conventional warfare environments. However, joint lethal fires in the form of mortar, cannon, rocket, missile or aerial delivered munitions also helped successfully shape operations in the small wars and counterinsurgencies of the past. Although, the focus of irregular warfare in most historical examples is on non-kinetic or “soft” means, kinetic lethal fires were required in most phases of combat operations to be successful with combating insurgencies. One such historical conflict that provided the US firsthand experience with the difficulties of counterinsurgency operations was the war in Vietnam. The issues and lessons learned from this historical case can be applied to present day operations combating insurgents in OEF and OIF. Although much has changed about the enemy, environment, and technology; the fundamental tools available to conduct counterinsurgency operations remain the same. Now more than ever, joint lethal fires play a significant role in the successful execution of COIN operations.

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Section 1: Introduction

Over the past nine years, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have tremendously changed the way the US military views and conducts combat operations. Operations Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Iraqi Freedom (OIF) reacquainted US military and diplomatic leadership with the distinctive issues that arise when conducting counterinsurgency operations (COIN). These issues derive from the complications of targeting enemy combatants who utilize irregular or unconventional means to conduct warfare. Many of these issues were captured by lessons learned in Vietnam, but were all but forgotten by the time the Post Cold War period of the 1990s rolled around. By then, US military professional education curriculums and doctrine failed to focus on the complexity of asymmetrical warfare. As a result, those lessons are being relearned today.

Arguably one of the greatest complications our forces face today involves the use of kinetic operations in a COIN environment. As was the case in the past, the nature of today's insurgents is to operate amongst the population; consistently surrounding themselves with non-combatants and the public and religious infrastructure found in urban terrain. The enemy is well aware that the use of force is severely constrained by the operational, organizational and legal controls the US military operates under.¹ By using American collateral damage concerns to its advantage, the enemy insurgents believe they can shield themselves from mortar, cannon, rocket, missile, and aerial delivered munitions. This phenomenon has caused most military theorists to question and even discredit the role of joint lethal fires in today's contemporary operational environment. The focus on zero defects with regard to collateral damage has caused military

leaders to refrain from fully utilizing the lethal fires capabilities at their disposal. Apprehension toward collateral damage has created a number of restrictions that further constrain the kinetic line of operation (LOO). Accordingly, military commanders have become extremely risk averse toward the use of lethal force; some to the point that they may be overly cautious.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze and address the relevancy of joint lethal fires and to emphasize the importance of their integration in full spectrum operations. It is my intention to contradict the recent trend of dissuading the use of kinetics in COIN. Effective uses of lethal fires in modern day COIN operations can be determined by examining some of the historical lessons learned in the Vietnam insurgency. My intention is merely to make an argument that supports and demonstrates the significance of kinetics in COIN. It is not to advocate an increase in the use of kinetic operations without regard to collateral damage, nor is it to promote the use of lethal fires over non-lethal means. By doing so, I hope to encourage more open debate and discussion within our military communities about the ways to effectively utilize the kinetic tools at our disposal.

Section 2: Kinetic Operations in Vietnam

With the initiation of Operation Rolling Thunder in February 1965, the US launched a sustained deliberate air campaign over North Vietnam. President Lyndon Johnson intended to use air power to demonstrate the extent of United States' military prowess to Hanoi in order to eliminate their support of the insurgency in the South. He believed that air strikes could destroy enemy supplies and impede the flow of men and weapons coming from the North. He also believed that air strikes might help stabilize the government in South Vietnam.²

These air strikes were carried out weekly and targeted transportation, industrial and military bases in North Vietnam. However, the targets were severely restricted by the President due to fears of provoking Chinese and Soviet intervention and loss of US allied support. Furthermore, the targets that were executed had little to no affect on the insurgency in the South. "Two factors limited [the] interdictions effectiveness: the nature of the war in the South and the North's excess resupply capability. The war in South Vietnam was a guerilla conflict. Hanoi had only 55,000 North Vietnamese Army troops in the South by August 1967; the remaining 245,000 Communist soldiers were Viet Cong. None of these forces engaged in frequent combat, and the Viet Cong intermingled with the Southern populace. As a result, Communist supply needs were minimal."³ What's more, the supplies that were needed were being provided by China and the Soviet Union.

President Johnson, along with his military and civilian advisors, consistently acknowledged their awareness that the enemy was an insurgency conducting unconventional warfare. Yet, they continued to target infrastructure that would normally support conventional forces. What's

more, Johnson persisted with placing very restrictive controls on targets and the frequency in which strikes were carried out. Collectively these issues resulted in ineffective air operations and Rolling Thunder's ultimate failure.⁴

By mid 1967, the Viet Cong insurgency successes in the South led to the planning of the Tet Offensive. In preparation for this operation, the Viet Cong carried out several deliberate attacks to test mass formations and inexperienced troops. One such attack led to the capture of the South Vietnamese district capital of Loc Ninh until massive US air and artillery bombardments forced the insurgents out of the city. "A captured enemy document listed the objectives for the 1967 campaigns. These included encouraging units to improve the combat technique of concentrated attacks to annihilate relatively large enemy units, and affecting close coordination with various battle areas throughout South Vietnam to achieve timely unity."⁵

The goal of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) for the Tet Offensive was to end the war in 1968. "In preparation for the Tet Offensive, the enemy went to unprecedented lengths to assemble supplies and weapons and to infiltrate the cities."⁶ They believed that large scale offensive operations, along with the instability they caused amongst the population, would break the US's resolve and lead to the withdrawal of all US military forces from Vietnam. Once the US forces were no longer present, then the government in Saigon would crumble under the weight of the NVA and Viet Cong military might.

The initial attacks on 12 cities took place just after midnight on the morning of January 30, 1968. The following evening the main attacks on 18 more cities throughout the South occurred. "The allies cleared most of the cities within hours. However, in a few of the cities, particularly Saigon and Hue, the fighting continued for days...the 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry, entered the village of Bon Tri just south of Hue and encountered a well dug-in, regimental sized enemy

complex. For three days, US artillery, air strikes, and naval gunfire pummeled the positions...At 0730 on 24 February, US and South Vietnamese forces breached the southwest wall of the citadel and met only light resistance. An intense artillery preparation the night before had killed 161 enemies. With the citadel secured, the battle for Hue was over.”⁷

“Fire Support [during Tet] for American units in the Capital Military District, particularly in Saigon, posed serious problems for the artillery. Numerous homes and shops and heavy concentrations of people within the city limited the area where artillery could be fired... Gunships and tactical air proved more adept at providing support because the pilots had better views of the target areas. As a result, specific enemy locations could be pinpointed and damage held to a minimum...The Division killed more than 1,000 enemy troops. The *Big Red One* estimated that artillery and air strikes accounted for 70 percent of these enemy losses.”⁸

Joint lethal fires arguably proved to be the deciding factor of the battlefield successes experienced by the US and South Vietnamese forces during the Tet Offensive. The Viet Cong had made the mistake of conducting conventional-like operations against the most technologically advanced conventional force in existence. More than 39,000 Viet Cong died in the Tet Offensive. “In short, the Tet Offensive destroyed the Viet Cong’s combat effectiveness. To continue the war, Hanoi had to rely on its regular army, and Northern troops could not sustain the massive assault in the South. North Vietnam’s leaders thus decided to begin negotiations.”⁹

By 1972, President Richard Nixon decided to withdraw US forces from Vietnam. However, Hanoi was unwilling to agree to diplomatic peace accords and cease its ground offensive in the South. To persuade the North Vietnamese, Nixon initiated another air campaign known as Linebacker I, lasting from 10 May to 23 October 1972. The bombing campaign appeared to be successful at coercing the North to halt its ground offensive and accept US cease-fire terms.

However, due to stalled negotiations on the part of the South Vietnamese government, the North backed away from the agreement. Consequently, President Nixon, encouraged by the success of the Linebacker I campaign, ordered another air offensive campaign against the North on 18 December. This one was known as Linebacker II and it was so effective that the North returned to the bargaining table and signed the cease-fire agreement just eleven days after the bombing commenced.

“Both Linebacker campaigns ignored civilian vulnerabilities and concentrated instead on damaging Hanoi’s military capabilities.”¹⁰ The target types were very similar to the industrial and military infrastructure engaged during Operation Rolling Thunder, however there were no restrictions placed on the targets by this President. Furthermore, the nature of the enemy’s military operations was now conventional, so the destruction of these target types proved to be very successful at depleting resources needed for sustainment. By focusing the lethal fires on the interdiction of military supply lines and transportation assets, the air campaign forced the North Vietnamese leadership to concede to President Nixon’s demands.

Section 3: Vietnam Lessons Learned

The major air campaigns, Rolling Thunder and Linebackers I & II, provided some valuable lessons on the effective use of air power to deliver lethal fires. In his book, *Limits of Airpower*, author Mark Clodfelter explains that five key variables ultimately determine the effectiveness of airpower. These five variables are: the nature of the enemy, the type of war waged by the enemy, the nature of the combat environment, the magnitude of military controls, and the nature of the political objectives. The argument can be made that these five variables not only determine the effectiveness of air power, but they determine the effectiveness of the entire kinetic operations LOO.

Early air operations in Vietnam were rather ineffective because they failed to accurately assess these variables. The Johnson administration claimed to understand the “nature of the enemy” and “the type of war waged by the enemy” as an insurgency conducting unconventional warfare. However they still executed the Operation Rolling Thunder air campaign in a manner that was designed to defeat conventional forces. They focused on the bombing of North Vietnam’s strategic targets such as industries, power grids, and military installations; and interdiction targets like airfields, bridges, roads, and rails. The US military leadership was so focused on conducting operations against the North that they failed to realize that the enemy’s operational Center of Gravity (COG) was in the South in the form of the Viet Cong.

In the early stages of the war, the US paid little attention to the unconventional warfare and insurgency operations the Viet Cong were conducting. They failed to recognize that the interdiction targeting of the Viet Cong along trails and roads was very ineffective because they only operated an average of one day a month and needed very little logistical support to sustain

their operations. They also failed to realize that the bombing of industries and utilities in the North had little to no effect on the Viet Cong because they were receiving support from China and the Soviet Union.

The Rolling Thunder bombings also failed to coerce the North Vietnamese leadership to cease its ground offensive in the South. This was due in large part to the success of the guerilla campaign observed by Hanoi and to the ineffectiveness of the attacks caused by the political restrictions placed on the operation. These restrictions are a result of the Johnson administration's failure to accurately assess the "magnitude of military controls" and "the nature of political objectives." President Johnson's fixation on his negative political objectives of preventing Chinese and Soviet intervention and maintaining support of US allies, led to the micromanagement of the air campaign to the point that it was rendered almost useless. This supports the beliefs held by some military theorists who contend that coercion succeeds only when excessive civilian control over military operations does not exist.¹¹

The results of the both Linebackers I and II also seem to confirm this theory. "An Air Force report noted that "the prevailing authority to strike almost any valid military target during LINEBACKER was in sharp contrast to the extensive and vacillating restrictions in existence during ROLLING THUNDER." Nixon and the Joint Chiefs approved a master target list from which subordinates designed individual attacks. Rarely did the Joint Chiefs direct strikes against specific targets, and field commanders received authority to conduct raids systematically rather than piecemeal."¹² By 1972 the Viet Cong was all but eliminated and the North was forced to completely transition to conventional offensive attacks utilizing tanks and artillery instead of guerilla fighters. This worked out well for the air component because it was right in line with the doctrine by which the Air Force normally fights. The bombing campaign was able to focus on

attacking the North Vietnamese forces, which by now had become the enemy's new operational COG.

By limiting the amount of rules of engagement (ROE) to reduce "the magnitude of military controls" and by determining "the nature of the political objectives," Nixon was able to execute an air campaign that supported his "peace with honor" plan to end the war. Nixon understood that the defeat of the Viet Cong during the Tet Offensive forced the North to resort to conventional warfare. He was also aware that current political tensions between China and the Soviet Union made it highly unlikely that either country would intervene in the Vietnam War. Therefore he was in a position of advantage that allowed him to increase the quantity and frequency of kinetic operations. After the completion of Linebacker I, Army General William C. Westmoreland, stated that once President Nixon decided to use available military power in a manner that truly hurt North Vietnam, negotiations began to move in a substantive way.¹³

Of course air power is not the only means of delivering lethal fires, which is why it is important to examine the series of enemy coordinated attacks that occurred during Tet in 1968. Immediately following the Tet Offensive "Colonel Richard M. Winfield, Jr., 1st Cavalry Division Commander, in summarizing the actions and problems of the artillery, emphasized the conventional quality of the operation and concluded with a description of clearance activities and their consequences: "In the battle for Hue, the brigade was operating four battalions in the most conventional type of conflict that this division had ever been faced with. The brigade had its normal supporting artillery---three direct support batteries, a medium battery and, during the later periods of the attack, an 8-inch battery. From the 3rd to the 26th of February, those [artillery] units fired 52,000 rounds. In addition, 7,670 rounds of 5-inch to 8-inch naval ammunition and 600 tons of Air Force-delivered munitions were expended in the area."¹⁴

The most valuable lesson learned in that enemy ground offensive campaign was that an insurgency will always resort to conventional type operations in order to achieve their political objectives. Insurgents cannot rely solely on asymmetrical warfare to achieve their desired endstate. At some point they must take advantage of their previous successes and attempt conventional strikes on one or more decisive points in order to achieve their military and political objectives. Once this happens, as it did in Tet, the counterinsurgent must be prepared to bring all lethal force to bear on the enemy. Understanding that this assertion may be considered controversial at best, it is important to examine the concept further.

Section 4: Conventional Insurgents

One of the most renowned military theorists whose lessons on COIN are studied in professional military education (PME) facilities throughout the world is David Galula. As a French Lieutenant Colonel who participated in counterinsurgency operations in Indochina, Algeria, Greece, and China, he took the time to analyze his experiences dealing with irregular warfare and capture some of the lessons learned in his book *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. In this book, Galula dedicates a chapter to the doctrine of the insurgency. There, he discusses two theories that outline the strategic patterns and trends he observed during insurgency operations of the past.

The first theory is known as ‘The Orthodox Pattern,’ which was utilized primarily by Communist movements to overthrow a standing government. This theory involves five steps that an insurgency must take in order to achieve its political and military endstates. It is steps four and five that need to be examined further to provide support for this thesis. In step four, Galula states, “Guerilla warfare cannot win the decision against a resolute enemy. Protracted guerilla activity, so cheap to carry out and so expensive to suppress, may eventually produce a crisis in the counterinsurgent camp, but it could just as well alienate the population and disintegrate the united front. The enemy must be met on his own ground; an insurgent regular army has to be created in order to destroy the counterinsurgent forces.”¹⁵

This implies that the insurgency must eventually resort to some form of conventional operations in order to achieve success. However, there are cases of irregular wars from the past that may seem to contradict this notion, such as the conflicts in Algeria and Malaya. Nevertheless, the argument can be made that those conflicts terminated too quickly due to a lack of perseverance on the part of the counterinsurgent or, as Galula puts it, “crisis in the

counterinsurgent camp.” The conflicts weren’t allowed to play out because the counterinsurgent was unwilling to sustain any additional losses. Therefore, the notion that the enemy will “go conventional” is really based on timing and the determination of the counterinsurgency force. If the counterinsurgents are willing to endure the gradual and painful process of COIN operations, the civilian population may eventually tire of the conflict all together. At that point, the political control over the population that the insurgent requires will start to disintegrate. The insurgency is well aware that its source of power and freedom of movement comes from the population; it will do whatever necessary to prevent such things from happening.

“This, in turn, requires an overwhelming and sudden concentration of insurgent forces against an isolated counterinsurgent unit caught in the open--not entrenched; hence a *movement warfare* in which the insurgent can exploit his fluidity, his better intelligence, and the simple but effective cross-country logistical facilities afforded by the organized population.”¹⁶ Once the insurgents are able to accomplish this, they can move into the fifth step known as the “Annihilation Campaign.” Where, as explained by Galula, the insurgent’s military and political strength grows, while the adversary’s decreases to achieve a balance of forces. “From then on, the scope and scale of the insurgent’s operations will increase swiftly; a series of offensives aiming at complete destruction of the enemy will constitute the last and final step.”¹⁷

The other insurgency theory advocated by Galula is known as “The Bourgeois-Nationalist Pattern.” This is the shortcut theory where the insurgents are focused primarily on the seizure of power through the use of terrorist activities. At the same time, the insurgents are working on gaining the support and financial backing of the people in anticipation of an organized popular front. Once this occurs, the insurgent will have established its political objectives and will commence in the conduct of guerilla warfare until a formidable force is

ready. Upon such action, he will begin the transition toward conventional operations where “his units, no longer small, elusive guerilla groups, then offer better targets for the counterinsurgent’s conventional forces.”¹⁸

Obviously Vietnam is not the only war to offer examples where this phenomenon occurred. There are numerous other conflicts that can be referenced to support this claim. One such example that falls right in line with Galula’s first theory was the communist revolution that occurred in China in the late 1920s until the late 1940s. Various communist leaders emerged in China, but none of them achieved the political and military successes of Mao Zedong. Under his leadership, the communist insurgencies opposed to the Kuomintang (KMT) nationalist government in China united in order to move the country toward communist rule. Mao utilized a series of organized insurgent guerilla operations throughout the 1930s and early 1940s against the KMT and the Japanese occupiers. If you trace the movement to its earliest beginnings, it is evident that there were a number of insurgencies made up of farmers and impoverished peasants who were despondent about the KMT government. It was during this period that Mao concentrated on building his forces by uniting with the other insurgent leaders and by recruiting communists from the cities.

By 1932, Mao had successfully expanded the “Red Army” to a primary force of 45,000 soldiers with a supporting force of local militia containing over 200,000 active members.¹⁹ After the end of WWII and the defeat of the Japanese, Mao and the communist party agreed to unite all communist military units into one force known as the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). “By the time the war against Japan was coming to a close on the eve of the Second Civil War (1945-49), the PLA was well on its way to transforming itself from a highly dispersed force employing guerilla tactics and operations in enemy rear areas into a conventionally organized military force

determined to conduct conventional operations against the KMT.”²⁰ Supplied and equipped by the Soviet Union, this force of over a million men engaged in numerous battles against the KMT nationalists. In 1949, Chiang Kai Shek’s KMT government was finally toppled by the PLA.

Another example of an insurgency that moved to conventional operations was the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Turk occupiers in the Middle East from 1916-18. This insurgency fits the shortcut theory described by Galula in that the early stages saw mostly terrorist type attacks on the Hejaz railway. With the assistance of the young British Captain, T. E. Lawrence, the Arab irregular forces grew in size to the point that by 1917 they were conducting offensive conventional battles with Turkish forces. Some of the most notable of these was the Arab victories at the Battle at Aqaba in 1917 and the battle at the village of Tafilah in 1918. The transition from terrorist, to guerilla, to conventional operations by the Arab revolutionary forces led to the total defeat of the Ottoman Turks by 1919. Many of the lessons learned from the Arab insurgency operations are captured in T. E. Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and are studied by military officers and theorists today.

Section 5: Lethal Fires Today

One of the most significant lessons learned during the Vietnam conflict was one that we were forced to relearn during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. That is...we were not prepared to fight an insurgency. Leading up to Vietnam, the last occasion the US participated in any type of major unconventional warfare was during the war in the Philippines in the early 1900s. The initial intent of the Johnson administration was not to get involved with the insurgency. Instead they merely wanted to thwart North Vietnam's ambitions to control the South. It was up to the South Vietnamese government to combat the guerilla activities conducted by the Viet Cong. In fact, "assuming that the Viet Cong would be checked by 1965, McNamara ordered the US armed services to prepare a comprehensive plan for training and equipping the South Vietnamese to shoulder the burden of the counterinsurgency themselves as Americans withdrew from South Vietnam."²¹ No one imagined that the war would last as long as it did, nor that the insurgency would grow large enough to require foreign assistance.

The take away from the war in Vietnam is that COIN operations are extremely difficult and painful. Furthermore, the integration of Joint lethal fires into those operations is even more complicated, but it is a necessary evil. In a declassified document originally released by the headquarters of the US Military Assistance Command--Vietnam (USMACV) in January 1967, the authors summarized a variety of after action reports and other documents on military operations in Vietnam. Entitled, *Counterinsurgency Lessons Learned No. 61: Salient Lessons Learned*, this document provided applicable lessons learned from field commanders to "those leaders who will have the task of confronting the enemy on the battlefield."²² The thirty page document affords information on all facets of counterinsurgency operations. Specifically, it provides information that pertains to the importance of Joint lethal fires. In a section entitled

“Fire Support Coordination”, it states “friendly forces operating in RVN possess a tremendous fire support superiority over VC and NVA forces. The means to destroy the enemy are readily available. The problem associated with most tactical operations is to find the enemy and then fix him by aggressive combat and the use of blocking forces. The enemy can be destroyed then by attacking him with coordinated air strikes, artillery, naval gunfire (when available), and armed helicopters. The successful application of this fire support depends on close coordination.”²³

As previously stated, the US military was unprepared for the insurgencies that developed in Iraq and Afghanistan...But why? It was not because the military failed to learn from its experiences in Vietnam and from the historical COIN experiences of other nations’ armed forces. Those lessons learned were clearly captured and documented, as demonstrated by the USMACV and the works of strategists like Galula. Instead, it was a failure to remember COIN operations lessons learned and give it the attention it deserved. In the words of Army LTG William B. Caldwell, “we must not repeat what we did after Vietnam where we as a military forgot about counterinsurgency operations. This is a skill set we had...and yet we had to relearn it”²⁴ That being established, an argument can be made that the US military, or at least military theorists, also forgot the necessity of incorporating kinetic assets into full spectrum operations. The focus on limiting the use of force in stability operations due to collateral damage concerns has caused some to rule out kinetics altogether. It seems necessary at this point in time, to reacquaint ourselves with the relevance of Joint lethal fires in order to identify their purpose in OIF and OEF.

In an article written by General David H. Petraeus and published in the Sep-Oct 2008 *Military Review*, the former MNF-I Commander provides his position on the purpose of lethal fires in COIN. “Employ all assets to isolate and defeat the terrorists and insurgents...Success

requires a comprehensive approach that employs all forces and all means at our disposal—non-kinetic as well as kinetic.”²⁵ In that publication, General Petraeus also outlines and examines a model known as the “Anaconda Strategy.” It demonstrates the different roles and purposes of military and government tasks performed in COIN operations. With regard to Kinetics, their assigned role while Petraeus was the MNF-I Commander was to facilitate: counter-terrorist force operations, conventional force operations, Iraqi conventional and special force operations, and Sons of Iraq operations. They also served as means to target insurgent network leaders.

This model seems to fit the theory that insurgents will eventually conduct conventional type operations. Arguably, in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan, the insurgents have already demonstrated their ability to conduct conventional type operations on several occasions. The First and Second Battle of Fallujah in Iraq is just one example of the enemy’s ability to mass and conduct major combat operations. In Afghanistan, there were numerous occasions where the Taliban massed forces to conduct a ground attack on one of many small outposts situated along the border with Pakistan and in RC South. These incidents are significant examples where Galula’s , theories pertaining to an “overwhelming and sudden concentration of insurgent forces against an isolated counterinsurgent unit caught in the open” appear to be spot on.

As indicated previously, Joint lethal fires are also a proven and effective means to target high value individuals (HVI) in COIN. While it is common knowledge that the leadership hierarchy of insurgencies is mostly decentralized, there is no doubt that eliminating high ranking leaders is effective at causing some level of disruption within an organization. With this in mind, the accuracy of today’s precision guided munitions (PGM) enables a Joint Force Commander to target HVIs like never before. Two cases in point involved the deaths of senior al Qaeda leaders by PGMs. In June 2006, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed after an air strike against his safe

house in Iraq and in January 2008, a top Al Qaeda leader in Afghanistan, Abu Laith al-Libi, was killed by a missile strike. In both cases, the destructive force was applied so accurately that collateral damage was not an issue.

In the recently published *ISAF Commander's Counterinsurgency Guidance*, General Stanley McChrystal summarizes the use of lethal fires in COIN as follows, "there is clearly a role for precise operations that keep the insurgents off balance, take the fight to their sanctuaries, and prevent them from affecting the population...[kinetics] can be effective when the insurgents have become so isolated from the population that they are no longer welcome...and are reduced to hiding in remote areas and raiding from there. Setting these conditions throughout the year will enable kinetic operations to have an enduring rather than fleeting impact."²⁶

Section 6: Conclusion

The Chief of Staff of the Army, General George Casey, recently released the way ahead and role of land forces in the 21st century. The number one task outlined in the publication is that the US Army prevails in protracted COIN campaigns by being agile and versatile. An outside observer can clearly tell that the US military does an excellent job with regard to executing major combat operations. However, as demonstrated by this thesis, the military is still struggling with irregular warfare and counterinsurgency operations. One example is the recent tendency of limiting the use of kinetic options in COIN. Due to collateral damage concerns, military leaders often seem to be fearful to exploit the asymmetrical advantages offered by Joint lethal fires assets. As a result, the trend amongst many leaders and theorists is that kinetic options have no place in COIN.

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this thesis is to contradict that trend by emphasizing the relevancy of joint lethal fires and the importance of their integration in full spectrum operations. It is not to advocate an increase in the use of kinetic operations without regard to collateral damage, nor is it to promote the use of lethal fires over non-lethal means. The US Army's Counterinsurgency manual (FM 3-24) provides the best summary explanation on how to accomplish this. "Any use of force generates a series of reactions. There may be times when an overwhelming effort is necessary to destroy or intimidate an opponent and reassure the populace. Extremist insurgent combatants often have to be killed. In any case, however, counterinsurgents should calculate carefully the type and amount of force to be applied and who wields it for any operation. An operation that kills five insurgents is counterproductive if collateral damage leads to the recruitment of fifty more insurgents." ²⁷

To be effective at using kinetics, leaders throughout the joint military community need to be capable of planning and properly employing lethal fires assets. “Air and ground coordination should start as early as possible in the Joint Planning Process in order to ensure the operational requirements for [lethal fires] capabilities can be balanced and prioritized across the theater...ensure the right mix of assets to provide desired effects, optimize scheduling, and prepare collateral damage estimates for areas of preplanned or anticipated kinetic requirements in order to reduce the possibility of unintended harm to noncombatants or friendly forces.”²⁸

With emerging technologies in PGMs across the services, the lethal fires available to the joint commander today are truly remarkable. Joint commanders and staff must become very familiar with these weapon systems in order to fully integrate and coordinate their capabilities. It is clearly time for the Joint community to take the lead in developing efforts to facilitate this requirement. To accomplish this, the three components of leader development must continue to be utilized and stressed... “education, training, and experience.”²⁹

Asymmetric warfare in the form of insurgency operations is here to stay, yet the US is not at a disadvantage. Contrary to popular opinion, Joint lethal fires still has a place on the contemporary battlefield. It is up to our military leadership to utilize them as an Asymmetric advantage of our own. By doing so, joint lethal fires will continue to be a force multiplier in the execution of future COIN operations.

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²⁴ Caldwell, 6.
²⁵ Petraeus, 2.
²⁶ McChrystal, 5.
²⁷ FM 3-24, 45.
²⁸ AFDD 2-3, 25.
²⁹ Caldwell, 6.